

A Strategy for the Washlands

Burton upon Trent

December 2018

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Introduction

Burton upon Trent is characterised as an urban, hardworking town, which has its roots in the brewing trade. The town has evolved and developed around the brewing industry and this is reflected in its character and personality today. However amongst the brewery buildings and bonded warehouses is a local secret which is precious to residents and has its own community of users.

The Burton Washlands is a large area of open space which is used for recreation in the centre of Burton upon Trent. The Washlands contains plenty of walks and access to play areas, fishing, and other land and water based sports. Its location close to Burton upon Trent town centre provides the opportunity to combine a walk around the Washlands with some shopping or relaxing in the many café's and pubs.

The term 'Washlands' is common for areas of land which flood and store water.

Located on either side of the River Trent the Washlands is designed to flood and it forms part of the functional flood plain for Burton upon Trent. The river drains most of the metropolitan central and northern midlands south and east of its source, north of Stoke on Trent. The River is known for its dramatic flooding after storms and spring snowmelt and without the Washlands and other flood defence measures the town would be regularly underwater.

As an environmental resource the River Trent has huge potential and this is reflected in the various strategies and plans that have emerged in recent years. Amongst them is The Central Rivers Initiative which aims to carefully restore former gravel quarries which are located along the Trent River corridor to include the creation of habitats and recreation opportunities for enjoyment. A key project is Transforming the Trent Valley (TTTV) Landscape Partnership which seeks to raise appreciation for the local heritage and future use and management of the landscape. In addition Burton upon Trent is the capital of the National Forest, a project which aims to enhance former mining landscapes with tree planting which will provide for recreation and wildlife. These environmental initiatives in conjunction with the Environment Agency's Burton Flood Risk Management Scheme, which will deliver £17 million of improvement works, has given momentum to the ambition that the Washlands can be enhanced and form part of a larger environmental network which connects the River Trent with the wider environment.

As such The Washlands has the potential to contribute and compliment other environmental initiatives to assist in providing a continuous wildlife corridor. The Washlands also has the potential to reach out and draw in people from a catchment area that is larger than its current local presence. The wider population has grown familiar with new environmental and recreational opportunities associated with the River Trent and National Forest. The

Washlands can form part of this established network of visitor days out and provide a further opportunity.

The aim of this Washlands Strategy therefore is to create an up to date Washlands regional visitor experience which will appeal to anyone looking for a unique outdoor attraction. This strategy will assist in improving the Washlands to make it a modern asset that will attract new visitors to enjoy the environment and at the same time discover Burton upon Trent, whilst at the same time enhancing the area for existing users

Scope

The Washlands strategy extends to the edge of the Burton upon Trent from Branston in the south to Stretton in the north. It follows the river floodplain and includes the interface with the urban area and in particular the town centre.

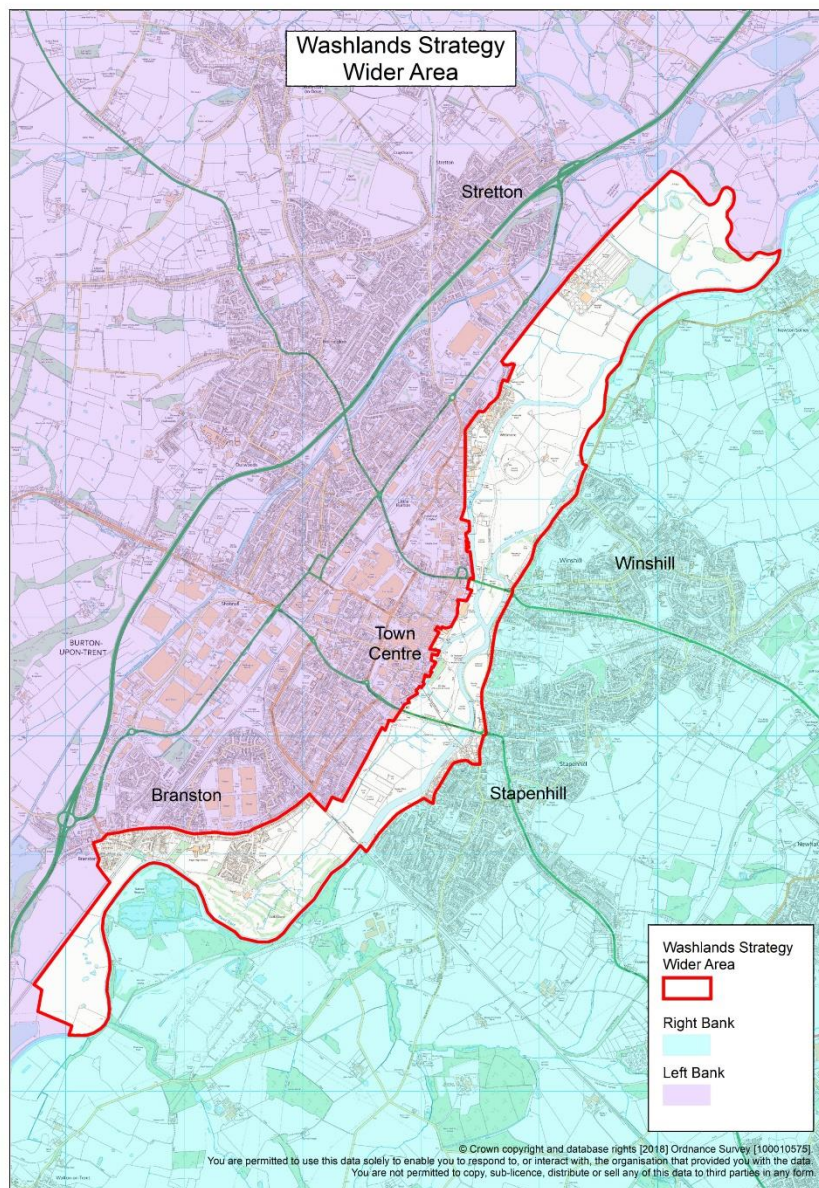


Figure 1: The Washlands

Context

The Washlands is a unique environment in Burton upon Trent and has been important since the 7th century when the Saxons built a small settlement next to it. The fortunes of the town has been closely linked to the Washlands ever since. Its fertile soils and good quality water stored in underground aquifers traditionally provided the town with trade such as wool and beer which was then transported on the River Trent to global markets. The Washlands continue to support grazing cattle and the thriving brewing industry still draws water from wells on and around the Washlands.

There are pools and ponds of water which remain almost all year on the Washlands and these support large populations of wildfowl. A rich patchwork of habitats line the River Trent following the river along its course ranging from swamp and marsh lands, wet meadows to grasslands and woodlands. Some of which rely on the periodic flooding to support them. These habitats support a range of mammals, birds and insects.

As a doorstep resource for Burton upon Trent the Washlands is accessible by foot for much of its population and recreation is an important focus for residents. It provides pitches for winter and summer sports, includes two rowing clubs and provides opportunities for fishing. There are many different types of walks around the Washlands which connect both sides of the river via the road bridges or pedestrian Ferry Bridge. This wide open space which punctuates a busy, thriving and densely populated town creates peace and tranquillity to support the well-being of its residents.

Its proximity to the town centre creates opportunities to access the amenities, facilities and shops and connect the population of Burton upon Trent to activities and culture. The town itself has a unique character based upon its current and historic association with the brewing industry. One which the town is very proud of.

The Washlands is a single entity but actually it has a number of areas with different characters and with different uses. For example The Hollows is used by many dog walkers and locals who play cricket whereas The Waterfront area provides a place for families to stop and have a drink or use the Viking play area. Stapenhill Gardens provides opportunities to sit and enjoy the flower displays and the woodland walks adjacent to Stapenhill Road provide a quiet opportunity to see wildlife.

Engagement and Consultation

In October 2017 a series of Community Conversations were held in six locations, each one being a set of four linked workshops. Participants were both members of the public and ‘technical experts’. The Conversations took place as part of the Transforming the Trent Valley (TTTV) Landscape Partnership Scheme to understand people’s perspectives about the valley and to influence the development of TTTV.

In addition, and over the years, the Borough Council has engaged with local communities to look at improvements and a Washlands Action Plan was prepared in 2012. Further discussions

were held at a stakeholder event in July 2017 in conjunction with consultation regarding the town centre.

Purpose

East Staffordshire Borough Council recognises the value of partnership working in considering how to deliver a range of enhancement projects. Added to that is the importance of taking a strong lead through the preparation of this strategy, the purpose of which is to provide a signpost to anyone wishing to deliver enhancements works either now or in the future. There will be many benefits to the known projects and any future projects as a result of this strategy.

It is recognised that delivering an improved Washlands will take time. Undertaking a landscape transformation cannot be achieved overnight and improving visitor and user infrastructure to support that transformation will require thoughtful and careful planning. This strategy will assist in providing a long-term framework which pulls together the collaborative work with other partner agencies, avoids repetition and sets the priorities for future change.

It is also acknowledged that transforming the landscape will require money, resources and perseverance. The strategy will assist in supporting any future bids for funding and provides a priorities framework for partners and the Borough Council.



Key Washlands Challenges

It is clear that there is an appetite for change. Understanding the positive and negative aspects of the Washlands and the current challenges that it faces in terms of the way it functions and is used is important. The following SWOT analysis does that.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cafes and eateries- Bookachino at the library, Meadowside, Costa at Tesco and all café's in the town centre ● Range of facilities on offer in the Town Centre ● Toilets at the Meadowside, Library, Market Hall, Stapenhill Gardens, and Tesco ● Town Centre car parks ● 3 play areas (Waterfront, Stapenhill Gardens and Upper Mills) ● Numerous bins and benches across the site ● Maintenance regime- regular litter picking, grass cutting and bin emptying ● Newly refurbished (2016) Ferry Bridge for car free sustainable access ● Awarding winning traditional tiered floral display at Stapenhill Gardens ● Flat area with mostly good access for less able visitors ● Burton Mail Centenary Woodland ● Playing fields and pitches for Rugby and Cricket ● Capital of the National Forest and National Forest interpretation boards installed in 2012 ● Many partners support the idea of raising the profile of the Washlands ● Green flag award for Stapenhill Gardens ● Events such as food festivals, theatre or family activities and opportunities for schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of awareness of current facilities and nearby cafes ● Artwork/sculptures on the Washlands is looking tired. They are also poorly acknowledged within the landscape ● Access to and directions to the Washlands are unclear from Market Square or the Town Centre. Hidden from view. ● Town centre turns its back on the Washlands ● No direction signs to the Washlands from other prominent locations such as Burton Train Station. ● Parts of the Washlands are inaccessible by foot due to flooding. ● A large proportion of the area can be subject to prolonged flooding. ● The area is currently not well “celebrated” or recognised. Very little social media references (positive or negative). ● Too much grass cutting? Does not maximise wildlife potential. ● No brand or identity ● Some areas poorly lit and hidden from view

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bargates redevelopment ● Town Centre Regeneration Programme ● History and heritage of the river, swimming baths, Washlands and Stapenhill Gardens ● Tree Management Plan for the area ● Green Flag award including Washlands, Stapenhill Gardens and Memorial Gardens ● Funding from EA (Flood Defences) and ESBC (LEP)/work of the TTTV and their lottery money funding. ● Link with the I-trees project ● Use of technology to raise awareness of facilities. Option to create a visitor app? ● Introduce boardwalks in key locations of the Washlands to increase accessibility for all ● Extended walks along the river to Branston ● Increased or improved lighting to expand the hours that visitors can access the area. ● Redesign of Abbots Garden and Memorial Gardens ● Painting of bins, benches and other metal work. ● Increase the number of scrapes to encourage wildlife ● Joined up working and information sharing with other projects such as the Trent Valley Trust. ● Reduction of mowing regime to encourage more wildlife ● Events to raise awareness of the area and history/heritage ● Create clearly marked trails for visitors from the town centre and across the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stakeholders may have different views on how the future development of the Washlands moves forwards. Achieving consensus may be difficult ● Increased footfall may actually harm the Washlands ● Limited resources financial resources will need to be used shrewdly and opportunities prioritised based on cost and feasibility. ● Improvements and additions need to include calculations of maintenance costs and agreement on responsibilities ● Possible duplication of effort between projects and schemes ● Loss of charm and character which is highly regarded by residents

Vision

As a consequence of the discussions and events undertaken, the SWOT analysis and in consultation with Senior Members of the Borough Council an overarching vision for this strategy has emerged which is:

Overarching Vision:

To develop the Washlands and the surrounding areas into a regional tourist destination.

To enhance the wildlife and conservation of the area, whilst increasing opportunities for education.

The Borough Council wants to achieve enhancements and improved access to the whole of the Washlands area. It is hoped that visitors will experience a welcoming place, healthy, safe and secure, that will be well maintained and clean and will offer opportunities for family and friends to enjoy recreational time together. Wildlife, nature and access for all will be encouraged and there will be opportunities for local community involvement.

In addition the Borough Council would like to see the Washlands become an integral part of Burton upon Trent town centre so that visitors and users of the Washlands can make the most of the facilities and amenities that are on offer.

The Borough Council's vision takes a holistic approach to the promotion of the Washlands in its own right whilst at the same time recognising the benefits that more visitors could bring to the town centre and the wider economy.

Partner agencies including the Borough Council have arrived at the following landscape vision which provides a structure for applying for funding and delivering environmental related projects. The landscape vision seeks to focus on the environment, landscape and heritage of the Washlands which is the main ingredient in making the Washlands a special and worthy place to visit. The landscape vision provides a good basis upon which the overarching vision has been developed.

The Landscape Vision:

Connecting People and The River

Improving access to the river for everyone, addressing issues of accessibility during flooding and providing facilities that will encourage people to visit the Washlands.

Connecting People and Wildlife

Enhancing the habitat value and biodiversity of the Washlands and providing opportunities for people to interact with and learn about the wildlife around them.

Connecting People and Heritage

Promoting the Heritage of Burton upon Trent and the Washlands and celebrating the history that has made the Washlands the place it is today. Restoring historic landscape features and improving the information available to tell their story.

Connecting Land and Water

Improving the lands and river as habitats for wildlife. Understanding the natural processes at work in the area in order to work with them, not fight them.

Provide weblink to story boards

Current Opportunities

Partnership organisations are seeking to make the following immediate impact.

Transforming the Trent Valley (TTTV) Landscape Partnership Scheme:

Development funding in the region of £250,000 had already been secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund and a full bid for approximately £3million was submitted in August 2018, with matched funding in place. This funding will fund projects along the length of the River Trent including the Washlands.

Environment Agency (EA):

A £17 million pound two and a half year project to make Burton's flood defences 'more resilient' and help protect over 3,000 extra homes in the town is due to commence in October 2018. As part of that project the EA have set aside approximately £500,000 to deliver enhancements on the Washlands.

Approximately £240,000 will be given to the TTTV which unlocks additional funds (matched lottery funding) and can be used to support some of the projects along the Washlands. A further £260,000 will be available to focus on enhancements around the Library and Meadowside area. In addition £10,000 will be made available for the delivery of 10 signs which will be sited from Branston to Stretton and the Clay Mills Pumping Station.

A bid for approximately £3 million pounds has been submitted of which £2 million is for flood defence works and approximately £1 million pounds is to be spend on Washlands enhancements. The outcome of this process which is being led by the Environment Agency is the end of 2018. The focus for the EA are projects located in the central area of the Washlands.

Appendix A sets out the total number and type of projects that the EA would like to develop as funding becomes available. Whilst the short term focus is on the central Washlands the EA have a longer term vision to deliver against the wider area. Appendix B provides a plan showing potential projects.

The Washlands Strategic work will be a long term project. Known funding may not be successful and unknown funding opportunities will not yet have been applied for. This strategy reinforces the Borough Councils position that improvements to the Washlands are necessary for the health and well-being of its residents and town centre. As such the Borough Council will seek out opportunities to bring in further investment to support this strategy. It will also review its ongoing open space maintenance contract and seek to provide monies that become available from various capital receipts.

A Strategic Group which will take decisions on bids, funding strategies and projects has been formed along with a number of sub groups each with the responsibility of looking at specialised areas. The Strategic Group will use this strategy to help guide their work.

It can therefore be demonstrated that there is a significant amount of work and momentum already funded and programmed. This work meets the Landscape Vision set out by the Partners.

If there are any plans to deliver environmental enhancements it is suggested that TTTV and the National Forest are contacted initially.



The Strategy

To deliver the vision, which is to develop the Washlands and the surrounding areas into a regional tourist destination and to enhance the wildlife and conservation of the area, whilst increasing opportunities for education, the following aims have been created.

It is not for this strategy to set out the exact plans particularly as most will be unknown at this stage but to flag up the issues that need addressing should the funding become available.

Aim: Give the Washlands an Identity

The Washlands as a place doesn't have an identity. To be able to promote the Washlands to a larger regional audience a logo is needed to make it instantly recognisable. Such a brand can be used throughout the site and also on signage and literature to direct people to it.

There is little awareness of the Washlands to communities not based in Burton upon Trent or indeed to residents in Burton upon Trent not living directly adjacent to it.

Actions:

- Create brand/logo for use on promotional material/signs/furniture
- Develop leaflets and websites, with partner agencies, to promote the Washlands
- Develop an interactive online map for users to explore the Washlands

Aim: Provide/manage car parking to accommodate an increase in users

On the Right Bank

In Stapenhill:

- The Stapenhill Gardens Car park off Main Street (10 spaces). Free
- off The Dingle (11 spaces). Free

In Brizlincote:

- The Hollows off Stapenhill Road (15 spaces). Free

In Winshill:

- Newton Road (approx. 30 spaces). Free.

These spaces are well used by local residents. The Hollows Car Park floods during extreme flooding events.

On the Left Bank

In Branston:

- Watson Street (approx. 70 spaces). Free.

This is a well-used car park and it is signposted but not particularly well. This car park is on the Washlands floodplain and floods annually.

Town Centre car parks in close proximity to the Washlands include:

- Library car park (79 spaces) at the Waterfront
- Leisure centre car park at Meadowside (179 spaces)
- Market place (9 spaces)
- Bond Street (103 spaces)
- Fleet Street (132 spaces)

There are other car parks in the town centre and available but are located away from the Washlands. Charges are applicable in all of the town centre car parks.

Actions:

- Prepare a car park gateway strategy to support increased visitor numbers to include accessibility from the car park to the Washlands, signage and lighting. In addition the strategy should explore directional signs from gateway locations along main roads into the town.
- Explore opportunities and deliver where feasible additional parking on the Right Bank with a focus on locations not liable to flooding.
- Promote Car parks through websites/literature
- Advertising opportunities on tickets

Aim: Ensure safe access for all

The Washlands is accessible to pedestrians from the two road bridges and the pedestrian Ferry Bridge crossing the River Trent and from the river walk which is located behind the high street. However town centre users approaching the town from the West would not have any cause to interact with the Washlands which remain out of sight.

Signage to the Washlands from the town centre is poor. Access from the High Street to the Washlands is available, but characterised by narrow passages and alleyways that do not invite pedestrian use or have particularly good surveillance.

Access for residents on the Right Bank to the Washlands is difficult because of the busy Stapenhill Road. There is only one safe crossing point along its length.

The Washlands attracts anti-social behaviour and is viewed as intimidating in some places. There are only a few lights illuminating certain stretches of pathways which results in the Washlands not being used after dark.

Actions:

- Deliver a signage strategy for pedestrians from the town centre and revamp the passageways to make them more inviting.

- Provide safe crossing points along Stapenhill Road which will allow Washlands users access to the Woodland Walks and conversely access to The Elms pub, cemetery, and greenhouse.
- Deliver a lighting strategy which would include the pathways and seating areas. The strategy should also consider feature lighting and should include the road and pedestrian bridges and key trees.

Aim: Resilience to flooding

The Washlands is designed to flood but this renders parts of the Washlands inaccessible at various times during the year.

Actions:

- Opportunities to provide board walks across part of the Washlands should be investigated to mitigate against those areas that retain water for much of the winter and spring seasons.
- It is recommended that an early discussion with the Local Planning Department is advisable.

Aim: Creating a unique day out where people can learn and interact with the Washlands

The Washlands provides a unique location for people to relax and enjoy their environment. There are a number of activities on the Washlands and various clubs that use the space for sport. Residents tend to use the Washlands for walking/dog walking, cycling, sitting and enjoying the peaceful nature of the area, feeding the ducks and swans or admiring the floral displays. There are also play areas and opportunities to stop and have food or drink.

There are paths and benches along its length with finger posts directing users. Not all of the finger post point in the right direction or direct people in the most efficient way. There is a sculpture trail and various interpretation boards dotted around the Washlands which reference the history of the area and the wildlife and trees that you can see. The sculpture trail has poor visibility and lacks information at each sculpture.

There are various structures around the Washlands and heritage assets adjacent to it that are undiscovered and require interpretation.

Actions:

- Create a mobile phone app which allows the user to access additional information as they use the Washlands
- A review of the fingerposts including location and information
- Provide Interpretation boards – wildlife/habitats/history/trees/birds etc-
- Provide a Viewing Platform from the Woodland Walks to see the Washlands in its entirety
- Provide event space at the library with the improved amphitheatre style seating

- Enhance the current Sculpture trail by making the individual sculptures accessible with supporting information.
- Explore improving the sculpture trail with new sculptures around the entire Washlands and also into the town centre to draw visitors in
- Explore opportunities to incorporate pubs/brewing history into a Washlands trail
- Explore opportunities to incorporate the Stop Line military history into a Washlands trail
- Explore opportunities to refresh/re-badge the existing Brewery Trail and Abbey Trail
- Promote the 3-2-1 Running trail and explore Park Runs
- Create a wildlife education area that can be used by schools

Aim: Improve the Interface with the town centre and promote the facilities available around the Washlands

There are facilities and amenities around the Washlands including within the town centre which need promoting. In particular and with good access to the Washlands there are various play areas, an ice cream kiosk and also a café on The Waterfront at the library.

The town centre has plenty to offer visitors including shops, cafés, and pubs. There are churches and a museum. Visitor facilities also include picnic benches, toilets and dog walking areas.

Actions:

- Prepare an interactive plan which includes the location of the amenities and facilities available to users with a focus on families
- Create an events space on the Washlands and manage a calendar of events
- Ensure that any Washlands literature/webpages include links to events taking place in the town centre such as The Brewhouse and Meadowside facilities
- Explore using sponsorship opportunities on displays and other features

Aim: Explore remembrance and sponsorship opportunities to assist with ongoing improvements and support The Friends of the Washlands Volunteer Group

The Washlands represents a quiet and tranquil location that many value locally. There are a few memorial benches dedicated by families to loved ones. There is also a tree planted which is dedicated to a family member.

Sponsorship opportunities have been explored elsewhere around the Borough particularly in relation to flower displays in various locations.

Actions:

- Explore new or improved park furniture such as benches overlooking the river or tree planting opportunities where families can remember loved ones who enjoyed the Washlands
- Explore using sponsorship opportunities on displays and other features
- Set up a Friends of the Washlands Volunteer Group to assist with environmental management

ESBC Open Spaces

During summer months despite longer lighter hours the tree cover/canopy and general dense undergrowth results in pathways feeling dark and unsafe. This is particularly the case in the woodland walk on the Right Bank and opposite the winery on the Left Bank. Of particular note is that many benches no longer look out over the river due to trees which have grown and are intervening features.

There are woodland clumps in the centre of the Washlands which appear dense and impenetrable and also screen some of the artwork and sculptures.

The once more formal setting of the Washlands with the Victorian walls and follies have disappeared due to undergrowth. The Woodland Walks are overgrown with a lot of self-seeded trees.

The Borough Council has a strategy for the current management of the Washlands which includes regular mowing of the open areas, maintenance of key trees which are numbered across the site, and the delivery of Stapenhill Gardens to Green Flag status.

It is very clear to current users which parts of the Washlands have investment in terms of maintenance.

Actions:

- A review of the ESBC maintenance strategy and associated contract is necessary to bring the whole of the Washlands up to the same standard, particularly in relation to the area between the two bridges. A strategy should include the following:
 - Keeping paths clear
 - Unveiling Victorian features
 - Wholesale maintenance of wooded areas to include the removal of small dense self-seeded trees whilst retaining structured wooded areas to ensure future tree succession and ecological interest
 - Opening up views of the Washlands along the length of the river and from Stapenhill Road
 - Clearing out wooded areas opposite the Remembrance Gardens which have dense tree growth and undergrowth which hide views across the river to the Winery

- Review the grass cutting regime to include opportunities to create new habitats which have higher biodiversity

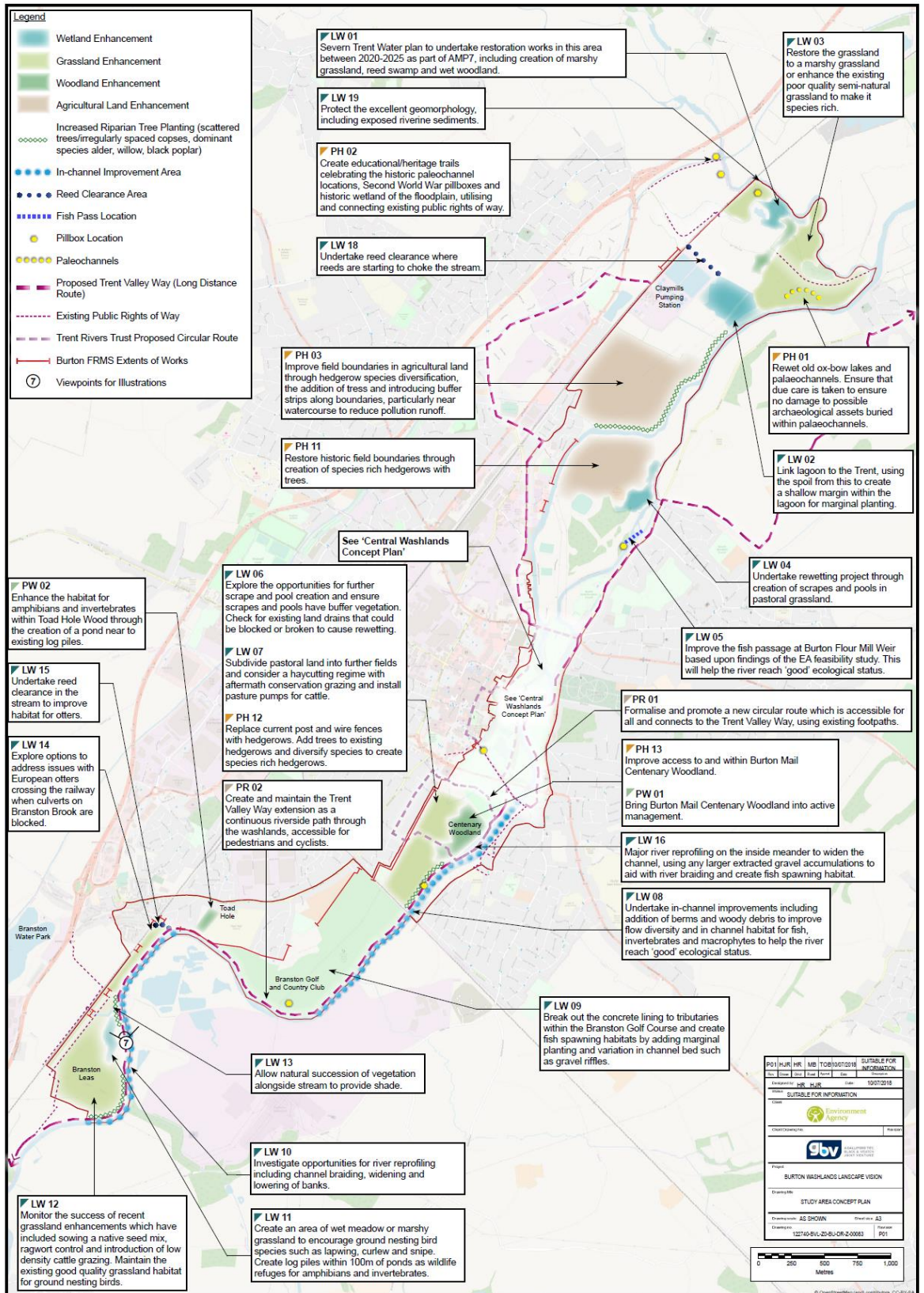
Provide additional litter bins, benches and picnic tables for users.

Environmental enhancement

The River Corridor is recognised as an oasis and the flooding provides a rich mosaic of habitats that need to be conserved and improved through better habitats management.

- Support partnership working to bring forwards the plans and programmes of organisations such as TTTV/EA/SWT.
- Support opportunities to deliver bird hides to encourage bird watchers to the area.

Appendix A: Wider Landscape Vision for the Burton upon Trent Washlands



Appendix B: Central Landscape Vision for the Burton upon Trent Washlands

